



THE *Daily* Beacon

TUESDAY  MAY 9, 2017



Steve Aoyagi competes in boccia, Monday, May 8.

Photos by Emilee Arledge/ VA Public Affairs Volunteer

Health Care Center in North Chicago, Illinois, is 100 percent disabled. He said the Games and other events let him focus on what he enjoys and strengthens bonds with his fellow Veterans.

"I started coming about five years ago, and it's a wonderful thing they are doing," he said. "There is just a brotherhood, and this is one of the greatest benefits offered to us. I'm a little slower than I used to be, but that doesn't stop me."

This year he'll compete in shuffleboard, 9-ball, boccia and bowling. He also competes in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, the National Veterans Tee Tournament, Valor Games and Endeavor Games.

Aoyagi said his seven years in the Air Force was a great way to see the world. But these days he uses a mobile chair because of the neurological disease that attacks his muscles, is on an insulin pump for severe diabetes and works through his post-traumatic stress.

His service dog, Johnny, a donation from Canine Companions, is constantly at his side to help him open and close doors and retrieve items, and also helps with anxiety and other issues caused by PTSD.

Johnny is a 2-month-old Labrador Retriever, and if you

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No stopping for Chicago Veteran

Story by Gary Kunich

Like all his friends, Steve Aoyagi was ready to join the military in 1968, but his mom wanted it her way.

"The whole neighborhood enlisted. I wanted the Marines and she refused to sign the paperwork. She said only the Navy or Air Force because she knew Marines were going to Vietnam."

He joined the Air Force and became a C-130 crew chief, but ended up getting stationed throughout Thailand and Vietnam from 1970 to 1974.

Aoyagi, who gets his care at the Captain James A. Lovell Federal



Dr. Skye McDougall (Director, VISN 16) assists Veteran Russell Nelson in navigating the blind boccia course.

TUESDAY, MAY 9
8 – 10:30 a.m.
EXHIBITION ARCHERY Hiller Park
8 – 11 a.m.
AIR RIFLE Mississippi Coast Convention Center Hall C/D
8 a.m. – 3 p.m.
GOLF Oaks Golf Club
9 a.m. – Noon
BADMINTON SINGLES Miss. Coast Convention Center E2 55-59, 75-79
BOCCIA SINGLES Mississippi Coast Convention Center E1 65-69
HORSESHOES Miss. Coast Conv. Center E4 (WC/VI) 80-84, 85-89, 90+
NINEBALL Mississippi Coast Convention Center Hall D 60-64
EXH. PICKLEBALL Mississippi Coast Convention Center E1
SHUFFLEBOARD Mississippi Coast Convention Center E4 70-74
11 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.
EXH. ARCHERY Hiller Park
EXH. BASKETBALL Mississippi Coast Convention Center E1
Noon – 3 p.m.
TABLE TENNIS Mississippi Coast Convention Center E3 55-59
12:30 – 2:30 p.m.
AIR RIFLE Mississippi Coast Convention Center Hall C/D
1 – 4 p.m.
BADMINTON SINGLES Convention Center E2 80-84, 85-89, 90
BOCCIA SINGLES Miss. Coast Convention Center E1 70-74, 75-79
1 – 5 p.m.
SHUFFLEBOARD Mississippi Coast Convention Center E4 65-69
2 – 4 p.m.
EXH. ARCHERY Hiller Park
3 – 6 p.m.
AIR RIFLE Mississippi Coast Convention Center Hall C/D
HORSESHOES Mississippi Coast Convention Center E4 55-59
NINEBALL Mississippi Coast Convention Center Hall D W/C ALL, 85-
TABLE TENNIS Mississippi Coast Convention Center E3 65-69
4 – 7 p.m.
BOWLING Cypress Lanes 60-64, 75-79
5 – 7 p.m.
EXB. BASKETBALL Miss. Coast Convention Center E1 CHAMPIONSHIP

Wheelchair, Visually Impaired, ALL, All Ages includes all age groups

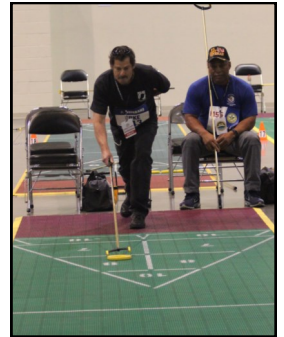


Shuffle, shuffle!

Photo by Lee Corbain/
Media Center Volunteer

Javelins up!

Photo by Wayne Alley/
Gulf Coast VA Medical
Center/ Medical Media



Take your best shot!

Photo by Emilee
Arledge/ VA Public
Affairs Volunteer



Throwing the distance!

Photo by Wayne Alley/
Gulf Coast VA Medical
Center/ Medical Media



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get too close, he might come up and give you a friendly lick.

"He knows more than 45 commands, and helps me to live," Aoyagi said.

His wife, Ann Marie, said living through PTSD can be difficult, but the care he gets through VA and Johnny, has been indispensable.

"It's like a wave, and it comes and goes in cycles," she said. "That can be very tough because depression manifests as anger in men, but he has all the psychologists and psychiatrists and stress teams who are there, and that helps."

And the Games, he said, helps him forget those challenges for a time.

"When I come here, I meet old friends. I make new friends. It's not just relaxing; it makes you feel good about yourself. I wished we could get every Veteran to these Games."

But Aoyagi also gives credit to Ann Marie, his wife of 32 years.

"She's the best," he said. "She does all the work around the house. She takes care of things. She gets my scooter in and out of the car and does all the driving. She is not just my caregiver. I couldn't do any of this without her."



VA

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of Veterans Affairs